International Differences in Employee Silence Motives: Scale Validation, Prevalence, and Relationships with Culture Characteristics across 33 Countries

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International Differences in Employee Silence Motives: Scale Validation, Prevalence, and Relationships with Culture Characteristics across 33 Countries

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Abstract

Employee silence, the withholding of work-related ideas, questions, or concerns from someone who could effect change, has been proposed to hamper individual and collective learning as well as the detection of errors and unethical behaviors in many areas of the world. To facilitate cross-cultural research, we validated an instrument measuring four employee silence motives (i.e., silence based on fear, resignation, prosocial, and selfish motives) in 21 languages. Across 33 countries (N = 8,222) representing diverse cultural clusters, the instrument shows good psychometric properties (i.e., internal reliabilities, factor structure, measurement invariance). Results further revealed similarities and differences in the prevalence of silence motives between countries, but did not necessarily support cultural stereotypes. To explore the role of culture for silence, we examined relationships of silence motives with the societal practices cultural dimensions from the GLOBE Program. We found relationships between silence motives and power distance, institutional collectivism, and uncertainty avoidance. Overall, the findings suggest that relationships between silence and cultural dimensions are more complex than commonly assumed. We discuss the explanatory power of nations as (cultural) units of analysis, our social scientific approach, the predictive value of cultural dimensions, and opportunities to extend silence research geographically, methodologically, and conceptually.

Keywords: Employee silence; voice; context; culture; cross-cultural research

In many countries, media reports and research emphasize that inefficacies, unethical practices, errors, and safety issues endure because employees withhold their views, questions, ideas, and concerns (e.g., Allard-Poesi & Hollet-Haudebert, 2017; Gibson & Singh, 2003; Joshi, 2016; Maree, 2016; Sheriff, 2000). Highly visible cases include fraud in the automotive industry, harassment in the entertainment industry, the military, and sports teams, misconduct in law enforcement, abuse of children and older people in educational, caring, and religious institutions, and bullying in health services (e.g., DJI, 2015; Ewing & Bowley, 2015; NHS, 2017; Prasad, 2018; United Nations, 2014; WHO, 2002). Besides these cases covered by the media, there is evidence that on a monthly, weekly, or even daily basis, many employees encounter situations in which they think that something should be addressed, but rarely speak up, hampering individual and collective effectiveness, development, and well-being (e.g., Knoll et al., 2019; Maxfield, 2016; Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Pinder & Harlos, 2001).

Despite an increased interest in these issues in many regions of the world, no systematic attempts exist to integrate international research on employee silence, and approaches to silence differ in their stage of conceptual and methodological development (e.g., Knoll et al., 2016; Morrison, 2014; Sherf et al., 2020). While diversity in approaches is valuable at early stages of theoretical development, when a concept matures and is to be applied in practice, research advances by comparability of assessment and findings (Edmondson & McManus, 2007). In addition, while culture and communication are interwoven (Lehman et al., 2004; Merkin et al., 2014), little systematic knowledge is available to explain how the specifics of culture may affect employees' motives for withholding their views. Conceptual articles proposed that cultural differences may exist regarding employees' tendency and motivation to express or withhold their views (Kwon & Farndale, 2020; Morrison, 2014), but very few studies have examined employee silence in

more than one country. To advance understanding of employee silence as an international organizational challenge (George et al., 2016), to integrate conceptual developments in diverse disciplines, and to address a lack of empirical research, we conducted a large-scale study examining employee silence in diverse cultural regions.

Our study contributes to the literature in three important ways. First, we adapt an established instrument for assessing differentially motivated silence types (i.e., silence based on fear, resignation, prosocial, and opportunistic motives; Knoll & van Dick, 2013) to 21 languages, and examine the scales' psychometric properties (i.e., internal consistency, factor structure, measurement invariance) in samples from 33 countries. Second, to advance understanding of the link between culture and employee silence, we examine whether approaches developed to differentiate between national cultures can be applied to explain international differences and similarities in the prevalence of silence motives. Specifically, we propose and test links between silence motives and societal practices dimensions from the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (*GLOBE*) research program framework (House et al., 2004) – an established approach to characterize cultural influences on organizational behavior (Dorfman et al., 2014; Urbach et al., 2020). Our study offers a rare opportunity to examine the relationship between culture and silence, because it provides sufficient variance in cultural variables of interest, minimizes context effects, and allows for examining cultural differences at the level at which they occur (Spector et al., 2015; Tsui et al., 2007). Third, based on our findings, we discuss the limitations of nations as (cultural) units of analysis and our social scientific approach, and we propose opportunities to extend silence research geographically, methodologically, and conceptually.

We hope that our research facilitates international attempts to overcome the detrimental effects of silence. Besides, it shall help scholars and practitioners to address communication challenges that organizations face when employing an international

workforce, collaborating with partners in different countries, staffing culturally diverse teams, assigning expatriates, and attempting to transfer participation schemes to acquired international branches (Lewin, 2015; Tung & Stahl, 2018).

Theoretical Background and Research Questions

Employee Silence and Its Underlying Motives

Addressing issues and expressing ideas and concerns (i.e., voice) is a way to express oneself and can lead to improved (e.g., more efficient and less harmful) circumstances at work, and may even increase one's status within the group (e.g., Chamberlin et al., 2018; Jetten & Hornsey, 2014; Weiss & Morrison, 2019). However, voice also exposes those who speak out, challenges the authority and judgment of others, disrupts routines and the smooth operation of groups which, in turn, potentially threatens relationships, group harmony, and status hierarchies (Brinsfield et al., 2009; van Dyne et al., 1995). Due to these potential costs of speaking out and speaking up, there are several reasons that motivate employees to remain silent (for recent reviews, see Knoll et al., 2016; Morrison, 2014; Sherf et al., 2020).

Four of the most prominent silence motives are subject of our study. First, studies have shown that employees remain silent at work due to a fear that speaking up may have negative effects on their career, damage relationships, or lead to being labelled as a "troublemaker" by superiors or colleagues (Kish-Gephardt et al., 2009; Milliken et al., 2003). This phenomenon has been called *quiescent silence* (Pinder & Harlos, 2001). While research on whistleblowing and retaliation shows that these fears are not unreasonable (Cortina & Magley, 2003; Miceli et al., 2008), remaining silent due to a fear of speaking up comes with a price as well, namely, high-arousal negative affect and increased exhaustion and depersonalization (Kirrane et al., 2017; Knoll et al., 2019). Second, Pinder and Harlos (2001) suggested that besides silence that is based on fear employees withhold their views because they think that speaking up will not make a difference and that potential recipients are not

responsive or interested in the particular issue. This type of silence labelled *acquiescent silence* by Pinder and Harlos, is also accompanied by negative affect but with a lower arousal level compared to quiescent silence, bearing similarities to the state of learned helplessness (Kirrane et al., 2017; Seligman, 1975).

Subsequent research emphasized the relevance of prosocial and selfish motives for the occurrence of silence in organizations (for more extensive typologies, see Bies, 2009; Brinsfield, 2013; Kurzon, 2007). A third type of silence, *prosocial silence*, suggests that employees withhold their views to protect or not to embarrass their superiors, colleagues, or a specific group (e.g., organization, profession; van Dyne et al., 2003). Prosocial silence differs from quiescent and acquiescent silence in that it is accompanied by positive emotions and the intention to benefit others. However, it does not exclude negative emotions such as shame, sadness, and fear (Kirrane et al., 2017). Thus, prosocial silence is more complex than other silence types (Perlow & Repenning, 2009). This might be one reason for the divergent and in part ambivalent relationships with other constructs such as health, job satisfaction, and voice opportunities (Knoll & van Dick, 2013), as well as its association with both positive and negative outcomes (Umphress et al., 2010). Finally, a fourth type of silence, *opportunistic silence*, has been introduced to consider the fact that silence is, at times, based on rather selfish motives, such as the intention of protecting a knowledge advantage or avoiding additional workload (Knoll & van Dick, 2013). Opportunistic silence has its roots in the literatures on knowledge hiding, knowledge hoarding, and counterproductive work behaviors (Connelly et al., 2019; Evans et al., 2015) and is rather negatively connoted.

National Culture and International Differences in Employee Silence

Culture can be defined as a set of shared beliefs, values, norms, meanings, and practices that have been learned while societies solved problems of external adaptation (e.g., dealing with external threats and securing resources) and internal regulation (e.g., how power

and status are distributed and how conflicts are resolved; Schein, 2017). Shared patterns of social behavior and thinking are transmitted through social institutions and artefacts such as schools, hierarchies, laws, and reward systems which, in turn, shape and justify individual and group beliefs and actions (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952). In our study, we use countries as cultural units, because they are relatively stable societies, have clear geographical boundaries and institutionalized rules of what constitutes membership, they generally have a common law system, political institutions, and a history of collective problem solving (for respective discussions, see Chen et al., 2009; Peterson et al., 2018; Taras et al., 2016).

National culture affects organizational behavior in several ways (Tsui et al., 2007). A key way is by providing its members (which constitute the majority of the workforce in a country) a framework for constituting the self and interpreting reality (including perceptions and evaluations) and by providing norms regarding communication and (inter)action (Gelfand et al., 2017; Triandis, 1996). National cultures also affect the shape of organizations and thus the immediate context in which employees operate (e.g., leadership styles and formal voice mechanisms; Dickson et al., 2004; Kwon & Farndale, 2020). While we do not explicitly examine how national culture affects the organizational context in which our study participants work, we need to consider that the immediate work context is embedded in a national macro context (Johns, 2006; Peterson & Barreto, 2014). A third way of influence that is beyond the scope of the current study is that culture moderates the effects of individual differences and factors of the immediate work context on organizational behavior (Tsui et al., 2007). We elaborate on this influence in the discussion.

So far, employee silence has been examined in a rather limited scope of countries with South Asian and Arab countries recently complementing the traditional focus on Confucian Asian and Western countries (Hawass, 2016; Jain, 2015). Studies comparing employee silence or voice across countries are almost absent (Morrison, 2014). Examining

how national culture affects employee silence does not only lay a foundation for research on culture and workplace silence, it also contributes to the ongoing debate on whether national culture has considerable influence on employee behavior (Chen et al., 2009; Tung & Stahl, 2018). Indeed, despite ambiguity, a lot of – in part stereotypical – assumptions exist regarding national differences and their influence on employee behavior, and these assumptions potentially misguide research and practitioner training and actions (Chen et al., 2009; McCrae et al., 2013). For silence in particular, prior research – for example, among samples from Japan, Korea, Australia, South Africa, and the USA (Gudykunst et al., 1996; Maree, 2016) – did not support assumptions regarding national differences in the use and valence of silence. To facilitate understanding of how silence manifests itself across nations, we validate an instrument to conduct cross-cultural research and use it to examine differences (or their absence) in silence motives across 33 countries from diverse regions.

Research Question 1: Do the scales that assess differentially-motivated silence types demonstrate adequate psychometric properties in each country?

Research Question 2: Are there differences in the prevalence of differentially-motivated silence types across countries?

Relationships Between Cultural Dimensions and Employee Silence Motives

Attempts to explain culture's effects on silence can be divided into two approaches (Ting-Toomey, 2010). Ethnographic approaches aim at identifying distinctive communication codes of a cultural community that, in turn, reveal this particular community's normative expectations regarding the adequate use of, for example, speech and silence. Examples for ethnographic studies on silence include Covarrubias' (2007) research on generative silence (i.e., silence as a powerful means to achieve productive personal, social, and cultural outcomes) in the communication of Native Americans and Sheriff's (2000) research on customary silence (i.e. a form of silence reflective of cultural censorship and practiced in the absence of explicit coercion or enforcements) surrounding the subject of racism in Brazil.

The second approach, called the social scientific approach by Ting-Toomey (2010), draws upon preexisting frameworks of cultural characteristics (e.g., individualism-collectivism) and uses them as independent variables to explain the differences and similarities of communication phenomena across countries. We decided to apply a social scientific approach based on the following arguments (Ting-Toomey, 2010).

First, utilizing conceptual cultural frameworks helps to create an exploratory system for why employees in several cultural communities communicate differently or similarly in accordance with a consistent, anchoring foundation. Second, drawing upon a cultural framework provides design parameters regarding to concepts that potentially explain the phenomenon of interest and thus should be included in studies (and those that might be omitted). Third, the cultural characteristics included in conceptual cultural frameworks (e.g., cultural value dimensions, such as power distance and collectivism) provide starting points for practitioners and trainers who aim to improve communication in international business. Fourth, cultural frameworks such as Hofstede's typology (1980) and the GLOBE framework (House et al., 2004), have been used to examine the relevance of culture for a range of organizational phenomena. Thus, by drawing on such frameworks, our research is embedded into the broader field of cross-cultural organizational behavior research.

Studies that applied the social scientific approach to examine the role of ethnic cultural factors regarding silence (or voice; e.g., Botero & Van Dyne, 2009; Lam & Xu, 2019; Rhee et al., 2014) focused on one or two out of potentially manifold characteristics supposed to differentiate cultures (see Lytle et al., 1995; Taras et al., 2009). Applying a more comprehensive approach, we drew upon a systematic and widely examined typology of culture, namely the GLOBE framework (House et al., 2004). This framework provides a differentiated approach to culture including nine dimensions for societal practices (see Table 1 for an overview), uses more recent data than comparable typologies (e.g., Hofstede, 1980),

and is well validated, as it is widely used in the field of leadership and management (Dorfman et al., 2014).

In our study, we focus on three GLOBE dimensions based on theoretical grounds (i.e., the nature of the situation in which silence occurs) as well as empirical grounds (i.e., the number of cases for between-country level analyses is limited to 33 countries; Maas & Hox, 2005). We developed hypotheses that specify that silence is likely to vary as a function of power distance (because silence means not challenging authorities), assertiveness (because silence means applying a rather indirect communication style), and in-group collectivism (because silence means not acting independently but being loyal to group norms). Note that we also explore relationships between silence motives and the other GLOBE-dimensions and discuss findings as additional, exploratory analyses.

How societies deal with hierarchy and power differences: Power distance

Employees who address critical issues, ideas, and concerns are challenging the status quo, and they question the judgement of those who installed the current procedures, rules, and practices (van Dyne et al., 1995). The idea that cultures can be distinguished with regard to whether their members are expected to accept or challenge the current distribution of power is prominent in several cultural frameworks (e.g., Hofstede, 1980; Schwartz, 2006; Smith et al., 2002) and central to the dimension of power distance in the GLOBE typology. Reviews (Daniels & Greguras, 2014; Kathri, 2009) suggested that in high power distance contexts, individuals with a lot of power are perceived as superior and elite, while those with little power accept their places in the hierarchy, defer judgments to their leaders, and are generally loyal and obedient to them (Bochner & Hesketh, 1994; Kirkman et al., 2009). Such loyalty and deference would suggest that members remain silent for prosocial reasons to protect or not embarrass their leaders.

Power distance is also associated with conformity as suggested by results of Brockner and colleagues' (2001) meta-analysis: compared to samples from low power-distance countries (i.e., USA, Germany), samples from high-power distance countries (e.g., China, Mexico) responded more favorably to lower levels of voice opportunities. A tendency to defer to authorities is also visible in the sources of guidance employees tend to rely upon when handling work events. In a 47-nation study, Smith and colleagues (2002) showed that samples from high power distance cultures relied upon vertical sources such as superiors, as well as formal rules and hierarchies, while contributions from lower-level employees were not seen as effective or appreciated. These and similar findings (see Lam & Xu, 2019; Taras et al., 2010) suggest a positive relationship between power distance and acquiescent silence which is associated with conformity and acceptance of the status quo. As members of high-power distance countries prefer directive leadership (Taras et al., 2010) and accept that the status quo cannot and should not be changed, they are likely to believe that it is more efficient not to rock the boat at all. Engaging in opportunistic silence would thus save them from additional workload and helps to avoid interpersonal conflict (Morrison & Rothman, 2009). Such a detachment-based reasoning is also supported by Merkin et al.'s (2014) meta-analytic finding that power distance is negatively related to propensity to interrupt.

Power is linked to emotional experience, with fear often being experienced by low-power individuals (Mondillion et al., 2005). In line with this reasoning, in Hofstede's (1980) conceptualization of power distance, members of high-power distance cultures are fearful of expressing concerns to more powerful people. However, this emphasis on fear is not evident in the power distance construct and its operationalization as per the GLOBE study (see Hofstede, 2006). Indeed, power may not always be associated with fear. While the abuse of power (e.g., by leaders) certainly induces fear in followers (Beugre, 1998), trust in hierarchy, positions and institutions can be comforting for individuals. Doney and colleagues (1998)

proposed that calculative prediction and capability forms of trust would be more prevalent in high power distance cultures. Such forms of trust are based on the ability to predict and calculate the potential costs and rewards of making oneself vulnerable to another, as well as an assessment that the individual or entity that is trusted will meet their obligations and expectations (Doney et al., 1998). Thus, we do not expect a positive relationship with quiescent silence, because employees from high power distance cultures accept the status quo and thus do not fear their superiors (Daniels & Greguras, 2014). Indeed, neither Rhee and colleagues (2014) nor Lam and Xu (2019) found substantial relationships between power distance and fear-based silence using individual-level data. In sum, we expect:

Hypothesis 1: Power distance is positively related to (a) acquiescent, (b) prosocial, and (c) opportunistic silence.

Whether societies deal with issues in a confrontational vs. harmonious style: Assertiveness

Whether members of a culture express or withhold their views could also be affected by the culturally-endorsed communication style (Merkin et al., 2014). Hall (1976) suggested that countries differ in their preference for direct (i.e., open and confrontational, which he labelled "low-context") or indirect (i.e., more harmonious and considerate) communication styles (which he labelled "high-context"). Several researchers (e.g., Brett, 2007; Ting-Toomey et al., 2001; Ward et al., 2016) drew upon this idea and showed that members of high context cultures prefer indirect (i.e., more harmonious) communication styles, are more likely to avoid conflict, and use more nonconfrontational strategies in conflict resolution and negotiation. The idea of direct vs. indirect communication style is part of GLOBE's assertiveness dimension (see Table 1).

Elaborating on the relationship between assertiveness and voice, Kwon and Farndale (2020) suggest that in high assertiveness cultures, norms may signal that assertive behavior is appropriate, useful to achieve instrumental aims and, thus, more important than concerns about harming relationships. This assumption suggests a negative relationship between

assertiveness and prosocial silence and a lower tendency of members from assertive cultures to be afraid of negative consequences that might follow from speaking up (i.e., quiescent silence). Further, as assertiveness has been associated with internal locus of control (see den Hartog, 2004), members of assertive cultures should tend to believe that speaking up will make a difference and thus acquiescent silence should be low. Prospects seem different for opportunistic silence. Assertive cultures value competitiveness and assign status based on achievement. As a consequence, assertiveness is consistent with a tendency toward opportunism (den Hartog, 2004; Doney et al., 1998) which, in turn, makes it more likely that members of assertive cultures withhold their views to gain a personal advantage than members of less assertive cultures.

Assertiveness has "rarely been studied as a dimension of culture in its own right" (den Hartog, 2004, p. 396), but research on Hofstede's (1980) dimension masculinity vs. femininity provides indirect support for our reasoning. Indeed, the GLOBE dimension assertiveness has been derived from Hofstede's masculinity dimension which denotes the degree to which a society values competition, achievement, heroism, and assertiveness rather than cooperativeness, modesty, and caring for the weak. In support of our reasoning regarding negative relationships between assertiveness and silence, masculinity was negatively related to indirectness, conflict avoidance, and conformity, and positively related to confrontation in meta-analyses (Merkin et al., 2014; Taras et al., 2010). Doney and colleagues (1998) provide indirect support for the proposed positive relationship between assertiveness and opportunistic silence. Reviewing research from diverse disciplines, these authors conclude that calculative processes are more expected and thus tolerated in assertive/ masculine societies, whereas honoring moral obligations is more valued in rather harmonious societies. In sum, we expect:

Hypothesis 2: Assertiveness is negatively related to quiescent (H2a), acquiescent (H2b), and prosocial silence (H2c), and positively related to opportunistic silence (H2d).

How societies perceive the relationship between individual and group: In-group collectivism

Whether members of a society challenge the status quo by expressing their views, and whether they expose themselves as individuals, should be influenced by the way they perceive themselves and their position in relation to their social environment. Several cultural frameworks suggest that cultures differ regarding to the extent to which they socialize their members into striving for independent/individual and/or interdependent/collective identities – with widespread effects on their members' cognition, emotion, motivation, and behavior (e.g., Hofstede, 1980; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Minkov et al., 2017; Schwartz, 2006; Triandis, 2000). In the GLOBE framework, collectivism is addressed by two dimensions (see Table 1). In our study, we draw upon in-group collectivism as this dimension is rooted in the extensive literature on societal collectivism (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1996), has been used to represent collectivism in cross-validation studies (Vignoles et al., 2006), and has been conceptually related to silence and (negatively to) voice in the past (Kwon & Farndale, 2020).

Collectivistic societies draw upon group norms, perceived duties, and obligations, and members of collective cultures ground their self-esteem, at least in part, in their ability to adjust and restrain the self. One consequence of being socialized in collectivistic societies is a tendency to communicate in a way that protects others and maintains harmonious relationships – a pattern which has been associated with the concept of face (Merkin, 2018; Triandis, 1996). In face cultures individuals derive their self-worth primarily extrinsically by fulfilling social role obligations, including that, besides preserving their own face, they also know of the importance of face for the self-worth of others (e.g., Leung & Cohen, 2011; Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003). Expressing diverging viewpoints or questioning a supervisor's or colleague's viewpoint, risks discrediting one's own and the other person's

face, causing embarrassment and feelings of shame in actor, target, and observers which, in turn, disrupt interaction and collaboration. Members of face cultures and collectivists in general try to avoid such disruption and know that others are interested in preserving each other's face in social interactions as well. Consequently, employees from collectivistic cultures should be more likely to withhold their views to protect others and social harmony. They should also expect others to protect them, but at the same time, to be interested in maintaining harmony and declining challenges to the status quo. This reasoning links collectivism to prosocial and acquiescent silence. Collectivists should further have a lower tendency to engage in selfish behavior to achieve a personal advantage which is the case in opportunistic silence. We do not, in contrast, expect relationships with quiescent silence. Collectivists should not fear their group members, because they know that group members do not discredit other group members and protect each other's face. This is particularly the case for higher-status members, such as managers, as these have a particular obligation to protect the collective.

While research on specific relationships between collectivism and silence motives is scarce, a large body of research supports the more general assumption that members from collectivistic cultures are socialized into accepting group norms even if their ideas and opinions diverge from the ideas and concerns shared by their group. Meta-analyses (e.g., Bond & Smith, 1996; Merkin et al., 2014; Taras et al., 2010) showed that conformity is more prevalent in collectivistic cultures while individualism, in turn, is positively related to openness in communication, propensity to interrupt, and confrontation, and negatively related to passive reactions to injustice, conflict avoidance, indirectness, and face-saving concerns. The only study that examined specific relationships of collectivism with silence – at the individual level – supported our assumption regarding the relationship between collectivism and acquiescent silence and the zero-relationship between collectivism and silence that is

based on fear (Rhee et al., 2014). Notably, contrary to our reasoning, Rhee and colleagues also did not find support for the expected relationship between collectivism and prosocial silence. We expect:

Hypothesis 3: In-group collectivism is positively related to acquiescent (H3a) and prosocial silence (H3b) and negatively related to opportunistic silence (H3c).

Additional dimensions included in the GLOBE framework

The GLOBE framework includes further cultural dimensions (see Table 1). While there is no strong theoretical rationale and consistent prior research to propose hypotheses regarding their relationship with silence motives, we explored how these additional dimensions relate to the four employee silence motives. Our aim was to identify patterns of relationships that have been neglected so far but may inspire future theorizing and research.

Research question 3: How are the GLOBE cultural dimensions uncertainty avoidance, performance orientation, future orientation, gender egalitarianism, human orientation, and institutional collectivism related to employee silence motives?

Method

Samples and Data Preparation

The Cross-Cultural Silence Project is an international collaboration of scholars from social and organizational psychology as well as management science. Data collection was centrally organized by the first author but carried out by each of the co-authors in their respective country. Table 2 show the samples' characteristics, and more detailed description of data collection strategies within the participating countries is presented in the Online Appendix. Thirty-five samples were collected from 33 countries. Canada and Switzerland are represented by two samples due to the two main language groups in these countries (i.e., English/French and German/French, respectively). The overall sample comprised 8,222 employees. Sample sizes in each country ranged from 145 to 463 with a median of 225 participants. To avoid biases caused by organizational membership or profession, we aimed to recruit heterogeneous employee samples. This aim was accomplished in that all of the

samples comprised participants from diverse age groups, many different professions and industries, and with varying degrees of work experience. Note that we excluded all participants that were self-employed, because we were interested in silence as it appears within organizations (Morrison & Milliken, 2000).

Measures

Contributors translated all scales using the standard procedure of translation-back-translation, and resolving inconsistencies through discussion (Brislin, 1970). The translated items of the employee silence scales are presented in the Appendix (Table S-1).

Employee silence was measured with the employee silence scale developed by Knoll and van Dick (2013). Participants first read a short paragraph outlining the situations we were interested in (i.e., they thought that colleagues or supervisors acted in a wrong, inefficient, immoral, or otherwise problematic way) and then asked them whether they spoke up to someone who could change the situation or tended to remain silent. We then asked them to rate their underlying motives for remaining silent. The item stem ("I remained silent at work…") was presented, followed by three randomly ordered items for each of the *four silence types,* namely *acquiescent, quiescent, prosocial, and opportunistic silence* (see Table S-1 for the complete list). The silence type items were answered using a frequency scale with the following seven response categories: 1 (never), 2 (very rarely), 3 (rarely), 4 (from time to time), 5 (occasionally), 6 (frequently), and 7 (very frequently).

Culture. The GLOBE project provides country-level societal practices and societal values scores (https://globeproject.com). We used societal practices scores, because societal cultural practices (as a culture 'is') mirror individuals' reality of 'how things are' in a society and how a societal culture is practiced in everyday life (Frese, 2015; Urbach et al., 2020). This is why practices are more likely to drive behavior than societal values (i.e., how a society's culture 'should be'). In the Online Appendix (Tables OS-5 and OS-6a-d), we

provide additional analyses linking the employee silence motives to additional cultural typologies. Data for the respective indicators were taken from the following sources: Schwartz (2008) for Schwartz' culture value orientations (https://geerthofstede.com/)for the Hofstede (1980) dimensions, and Minkov and colleagues (2017) for the revised individualism-collectivism dimension. To show relationships of silence motives with cultural tightness, we used data from Gelfand and colleagues (2011) and Uz (2015).

Analytical Procedure

Overall, we conducted four main analyses to address our research questions and hypotheses and tested them using the statistical software R (Version 4.0.3; R Development Core Team, 2020). First, to establish a proper measurement model of our measure (i.e., the four types of employee silence scale; Knoll & van Dick, 2013), we conducted confirmatory factor analyses (CFA; Brown, 2015) using the R package *lavaan* (Version 0.6-7; Rosseel, 2012), and applied the alignment method by Asparouhov and Muthén (2014) using M*plus* (Version 8.4; L. K. Muthén & Muthén, 2017), as we will describe in detail below.

Second, against the background of the hypothesized measurement model that fitted the entire sample well, we used multi-group CFA (MG-CFA) to assess measurement invariance (MI) across all samples (Davidov et al., 2018; Vandenberg & Lance, 2000). We employed a stepwise procedure and tested whether imposing additional constraints significantly deteriorated model fit by each time comparing the more constrained model with the preceding model using a χ^2 difference test (Stoel et al., 2006). Because the χ^2 test statistic is sensitive to sample size and minor model misspecifications (Bentler & Bonett, 1980; Bollen, 1989), we additionally evaluated change in model fit in light of alternative fit indices as recommended by Kim and colleagues (2017). In particular, we applied the cut-offs for the assessment of metric invariance and scalar invariance as recommended by Rutkowski and Svetina (2014) when testing for MI in multiple groups.

To allow for a meaningful comparison of the latent factor means across groups, scalar invariance is generally desired (e.g., Brown, 2015; Davidov et al., 2018; Vandenberg & Lance, 2000). However, "strict forms of MI, such as scalar invariance, which imposes identical factor loadings and indicator intercepts across the groups to be compared, often do not hold" (Davidov et al., 2018, p. 632). Muthén and Asparouhov (2018; see also Marsh et al., 2018) concluded that "traditional multiple-group CFA makes it very difficult to properly identify the sources of non-invariance due to too many necessary model modifications" (p. 642) and proposed the alignment method which has successfully been used to analyze MI in cross-cultural research (Asparouhov & Muthén, 2014; Cieciuch et al., 2018). This alignment method can be used to estimate group-specific factor means and variances without requiring exact measurement invariance, and provides a detailed account of parameter invariance for every model parameter in every group (Asparouhov & Muthén, 2014).

Finally, we tested hypotheses on the relationships of cultural syndromes with the four silence motives with multilevel modelling (MLM; Hox et al., 2018) in M*plus* (Verison 8.4; Muthén & Muthén, 2017). Specifically, we first calculated the unconditional *ICC*(1) and the unconditional *ICC*(2) for the four silence motives to inquire whether variance in the four silence motives was attributable to the sample using the R package *multilevel* (Version 2.6; Bliese, 2016). If between-group variance with regard to the four silence motives was statistically significant, we investigated the hypotheses with regard to the GLOBE framework (House et al., 2004). In addition, we also calculated the conditional *ICC*(1) – that is, the *ICC*(1) for a respective silence motive controlling for age, gender, and managerial position – for each silence motive using the R package *performance* (Version 0.7.0; Lüdecke et al., 2021). The small sample size at the country-level (i.e., cultural dimension scores from the GLOBE were available for 21 out of the 35 samples; House et al., 2004) limited statistical power to identify meaningful effects in our analyses (e.g., Hox et al., 2018; Maas & Hox,

2005; Scherbaum & Pesner, 2019). We therefore decided to generally include only one level-2-predictor at a time and included only the three dimensions for which we developed hypotheses in a combined model.

Results

As adequacy of measures is a central precondition for conducting cross-cultural research, we first report the psychometric properties of an instrument assessing employee silence motives across 33 countries. We then examine similarities and differences in silence motives across country samples and cultural clusters. To provide insights into the role of culture as an explanation for international differences in silence, we report results regarding the hypothesized relationships between silence motives and the GLOBE dimensions. Please note that our data and analysis scripts are available online (https://osf.io/8g9fe/) along with an extended online appendix (include reference to JOB link here).

Psychometric Properties of the Employee Silence Scales

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics and internal consistencies of the silence scales. To choose the proper estimator for our substantive latent analyses (i.e., CFA, MG-CFA), we initially checked for systematic missing data and whether the data were normally distributed: First, a multiple logistic regression revealed that missing data with regard to silence was not predicted by a participant's demographics (i.e., gender, age, and tenure; $p > .05$ for all). Second, a Henze-Zirkler test (Henze & Zirkler, 1990; Korkmaz et al., 2014) of the assumption of multivariate normality suggested that this assumption did not hold ($HZ = 35.09$, $p < .001$). Consequently, we employed the robust maximum likelihood estimation to ultimately obtain parameter estimates based on all the available information in the data and robust to non-normally distributed variables (Enders, 2010; Kline, 2016).

To examine the factor structure of the four types of employee silence scale (Knoll & van Dick, 2013), we performed CFAs in the full sample. First, we compared several

measurement models, specifically a four-factor solution in which we specified the four silence types to be orthogonal to each other (Model 1), a single-factor solution, with all items from the four subscales loading on one factor (Model 2), a four-factor solution with a second-order factor (Model 3), and a four-factor solution with correlated factors (Model 4). As can be seen in Table 4, the four-factor solution with correlated factors fitted the data best, $\chi^2(48) = 1{,}255.35$, $p < .001$, CFI = .96, TLI = .95, RMSEA = .07 [CI 90%: .07 - .07, $p < .01$], SRMR = .05. In addition, it fit the data significantly better than the second-order solution, $\Delta\chi^2(2) = 12.71$, $p < .01$, ΔAIC = 14.18[1]. We then performed CFAs on this best fitting model to examine whether measurement invariance (MI) held across all 35 samples, and whether the same factor structure held in all samples (i.e., *equal form* or *configural invariance*; see Brown, 2015; Vandenberg & Lance, 2000) and found it to be the case (see Table 5).

Next, we constrained the loadings to be equal across samples (i.e., *equal factor loadings* or *metric invariance*), which resulted in a slight decrease in fit but an acceptable solution nonetheless. Specifically, comparing this more constrained model of MI with the former one, we accepted it in light of the cut-offs of ΔCFI $\leq .02$ and ΔRMSEA $\leq .03$ as recommended by Rutkowski and Svetina (2014), $\Delta\chi^2(272) = 549.83$, $p < .001$, ΔCFI = < .01, ΔRMSEA = < .01. Finally, we additionally constrained the item intercepts across samples (i.e., *equal intercepts* or *scalar invariance*), which resulted in a substantially worse fit of this MI model with respect to the data. In particular, and against the recommended cut-offs for this stage (i.e., ΔCFI $\leq .01$ and ΔRMSEA $\leq .015$), scalar invariance cannot be assumed, $\Delta\chi^2(272) = 1{,}646.64$, $p < .001$, ΔCFI< .03, ΔRMSEA < .02 (see Table 5). This finding is rather common for studies investigating MI, particularly in a cross-cultural setting (e.g.,

[1]We also tested whether the fit of the four-correlated factors in each sample (Table OS-2). In general, the four-correlated factors fit the respective sample data well, but yielded suboptimal fit indices for Colombia, Pakistan, and Togo. Thus, we tested the competing measurement models as outlined above again in the full sample, this time excluding Colombia, Pakistan, and Togo – the results and conclusions regarding the choice of the four-correlated factors as the best fitting measurement model remained the same.

Cieciuch et al., 2018; Davidov et al., 2018; Marsh et al., 2018). Accordingly, we used the alignment method (Asparouhov & Muthén, 2014) to estimate group-specific factor means and variances without requiring exact MI, and to provide a detailed account of parameter invariance for every model parameter in each group. Against the basis of the configural model, the alignment method identified only a few sources of measurement noninvariance for the measurement loadings and the intercepts of the indicators (for details on noninvariant loadings or intercepts across samples, see Table OS-3 in the Online Appendix).

With respect to internal consistency of the subscales, Table 3 shows that the four types of employee silence displayed good omega scores (McNeish, 2018; Raykov & Marcoulides, 2019) across essentially all of the samples. Opportunistic silence showed somewhat lower omega scores and, in some samples, narrowly missed the often-applied criterion for acceptable omega scores for three item-measures (i.e., around .70). In sum, results indicate that Research Question 1 can be answered with "yes", because the instrument for assessing four types of employee silence shows adequate internal consistency and a fairly invariant factor structure across cultures.

A sufficient degree of homogeneity within countries provides further evidence for the validity of country culture measures (Fischer & Schwartz, 2011). Statistical evidence for within-sample homogeneity is provided by *ICC*(1) and *ICC*(2) scores, both unconditional and conditional, that indicate a considerable amount of variance explained by sample origin (see Table 6). Given that "ICC(1)'s in the 5-20% range indicate fairly powerful effects of the overall organization or society" (Hanges & Dickson, 2004, p.147; see also Bliese, 2000), in our study, the amount of shared variance explained by country membership justifies treating sample origin as a meaningful level of analysis. The fact that there is still a considerable amount of variance unexplained is not surprising, as nationality is a rather distal context (Hackman, 2003) and more proximal factors, such as organizational culture and individual

differences, are also important (Tung & Stahl, 2018). We elaborate on this issue in the discussion.

Employee Silence Motives across Countries and Cultural Clusters

Another aim of our study and subject of Research Question 2 was to explore whether employees from different countries vary in their motives to withhold their views at work. Table 3, which shows mean scores and standard deviations, suggests that the four employee silence motives varied considerably between countries. Results also indicate differences in the magnitude of the four silence motives for each country. We used the alignment method (Asparouhov & Muthén, 2014) to compare the latent means of the four silence types directly across our samples. Table OS-4 in the Online Appendix shows in detail where each sample ranked on each of the four silence types.

These results – along with the ICC scores presented above – suggest that Research Question 2 can also be answered with "yes". However, the distribution of silence motives scores across countries did not resemble established cultural clusters as defined, for example, by the GLOBE program (see also Figure OS-1 in the Online Appendix, which uses violin plots to illustrate the distribution of silence motives scores across cultural clusters).

Relationships between Cultural Dimensions and Employee Silence Motives

Dimensions that are proposed to characterize cultures are a way to explain similarities and differences across countries (Ting-Toomey, 2010). Tables 7a and 7b provide results from MLM analyses that were used to examine relationships between employee silence motives and the three focal cultural dimensions (i.e., power distance, assertiveness, in-group collectivism). As can be seen in Table 7b, these cultural dimensions explained a considerable amount of variance in the four silence motives whereby $R^2_{Between}$ was highest for acquiescent and prosocial silence and lower for quiescent and opportunistic silence. We further explored relationships between silence motives and the other cultural dimensions included in the

GLOBE framework. We could not test a complete model including all cultural dimensions, because statistical power to identify meaningful effects was limited by the sample size at country-level (see methods section; Scherbaum & Pesner, 2019). Thus, for each hypothesis, we report results for one separate model including one level-2-predictor at a time, and one combined model which included the three dimensions for which we developed hypotheses (see Table 7b).

Relationships with selected dimensions from the GLOBE typology. Hypothesis 1 proposed that the cultural dimension power distance is positively related to acquiescent, prosocial, and opportunistic silence. As can be seen in Table 7a, in line with Hypothesis 1a and 1b, power distance was positively related to acquiescent and prosocial silence. Hypothesis 1c, in contrast, had to be rejected, because power distance was not significantly related to opportunistic silence. When included in a combined MLM with cultural dimensions in-group collectivism and assertiveness (see Table 7b), power distance was positively related to acquiescent, but not significantly related to prosocial and opportunistic silence at $p < .05$ level.

Hypothesis 2 had to be rejected as assertiveness was not significantly related to any of the four silence motives. Hypothesis 3 proposed positive relationships between in-group collectivism and acquiescent (H3a) and prosocial silence motives (H3b), and a negative relationship with opportunistic silence (H3c). As the relationships with acquiescent, prosocial silence, and opportunistic silence were not significant at $p < .05$ level, Hypotheses 3a-c had to be rejected.

Additional analyses regarding further cultural dimensions from the GLOBE study. To answer Research Question 3, we explored whether any of the other six culture dimensions that are part of the GLOBE typology (see Table 1) are related to any of the silence motives using MLM with each cultural dimension separately. As can be seen in Table 7a, results

revealed statistically significant negative relationships between institutional collectivism and acquiescent silence, and between uncertainty avoidance and opportunistic silence. No statistically significant relationships were found between future orientation, performance orientation, gender egalitarianism, and humane orientation and any of the silence motives.

Discussion

Although the wide-ranging detrimental effects of employee silence are apparent and have been documented in many regions across the globe, little systematic knowledge is available on international similarities and differences as well as cultural specifics that may affect employees' motives for withholding their views. We advanced international research on employee silence by introducing a reliable measure to assess four types of silence (i.e., acquiescent, quiescent, prosocial, and opportunistic silence) in 21 languages and demonstrating its psychometric qualities. We further add to this aim by providing scores of differentially-motivated silence for 33 countries and revealing relationships of cultural dimensions from the GLOBE framework with the four silence motives. In the following, we discuss why our results regarding the hypothesized and exploratory links between cultural dimensions and silence motives specify and, in part, challenge traditional assumptions of the culture and organizational behavior literature on silence.

Essential to the power distance dimension is that people in high power distance societies do not challenge hierarchies by expressing their concerns to more powerful people. One potential explanation underlying this reasoning is that this may be due to fear as evident from the conceptualization of this dimension in the Hofstede (but not the GLOBE) study. Based on our nuanced approach to examining motives for silence, the relationships between power distance and *acquiescent* and *prosocial silence* show that high power distance facilitates conformity, passive acceptance, and a tendency to avoid causing conflicts. Further, our findings suggest that power distance is not associated with remaining silent due to fear of

saying something that could offend powerful people (i.e., *quiescent silence*). As such, a contribution of our study is that it demonstrates differences between the power distance dimensions as conceptualized by Hofstede and GLOBE (see also Hofstede, 2006). The fear of raising issues with powerful people as a lone individual is central to Hofstede's power distance measure; in contrast, the GLOBE power distance measure does not directly ask about fear. The GLOBE measure thus reflects that the abuse of power (e.g., by leaders) may induce fear in followers; at the same time, trust in hierarchy, positions, and institutions can be comforting for individuals. The finding that none of the cultural dimensions from the GLOBE typology explained considerable variance in *quiescent silence* could also indicate that proximal factors such as leadership and team psychological safety (Edmondson, 2018) have a stronger influence on employees' fears than more distal factors such as societal culture.

Distinct relationships of silence with in-group and institutional collectivism support claims that collectivism is multidimensional (Vignoles et al., 2016), and indicate that widespread assumptions regarding collectivism and silence might need to be reconsidered. In-group collectivism which traditionally has been associated with conformity and thus a reluctance to express diverging viewpoints, was not related to any of the silence motives in our study. Instead, institutional collectivism – the second collectivism dimension that was introduced by the GLOBE study (Gelfand et al., 2004) – explained considerable variance in acquiescent silence. Moreover, while a positive association was expected between in-group collectivism and silence, institutional collectivism was negatively related to silence. In the GLOBE program's validation studies, institutional collectivism was linked to involvement, team-oriented leadership, and teamwork prompting Gelfand and colleagues (2004, p. 472) to suggest that societies that are characterized by institutional collectivism seek to accomplish their aims "through collective efforts, through practices which are concerned with others, and through practices which are not being assertive or power dominating". Our findings support

this reasoning. In cultures characterized by high institutional collectivism, expressing one's views might not be perceived as dissent, but as a means to help the team develop and learn.

Promoting assertiveness, in contrast, seems not to be a way to overcome silence at work. We expected a negative relationship between assertiveness and silence based on the assumption that members of high assertiveness cultures are willing to engage in conflict, speak up, defend, and act in their own interest (Ames & Flynn, 2007; Kwon & Farndale, 2020). These features are proposed to facilitate voice at the individual level, but in cultures that value assertiveness, not only are individuals more assertive, they also have to work among assertive peers who may create a threatening context (Schneider, 1987). Given that a safe context is a precondition for employee voice (Chamberlin et al., 2019; Edmondson & Lei, 2015), employees in high assertiveness cultures may think twice whether challenging the status quo is worth the hassle. This hesitation might be reinforced by the opportunism that is associated with assertiveness as a cultural dimension (den Hartog, 2004; Doney et al., 1998). Taras and colleagues' (2010) meta-analysis provided some support for this reasoning: Masculinity, a culture dimension from the Hofstede (1980) framework that is associated with assertiveness, was negatively related to conflict avoidance, but it was also positively related to accommodating and compromising conflict management styles. Thus, our reasoning regarding a negative association between assertiveness and silence might have been misguided by an atomistic fallacy (Brewer & Venaik, 2014; Diez-Roux, 1998): cultural characteristics such as assertiveness might yield differing or even contradicting effects at the individual and collective level.

Opportunistic silence was also not significantly related to the three cultural dimensions for which existing theory and evidence recommended the development of specific hypotheses. Instead, opportunistic silence was negatively related to uncertainty avoidance, a cultural dimension that we included to explore potential relationships. This is an

interesting finding given that voice is often associated with uncertain outcomes for the individual who speaks up, and challenging the status quo is supposed to induce uncertainty in systems. However, at the cultural level, change is essential for survival and should not be oppressed by fear of uncertainty (Schein, 2017). To secure development, cultures that view uncertainty as a problem that should be avoided, might provide employees with opportunities to overcome uncertainty (Kwon & Farndale, 2020). This could include procedures that guide change-oriented behaviors such as formal voice channels which, in turn, should reduce silence in such countries.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Scale application and scale validity. We found evidence (i.e., internal reliabilities, factor structure, sufficient degree of homogeneity within countries, measurement invariance) that the Knoll and van Dick (2013) scale is a reliable and valid measure that can be used for international research projects and surveys that are concerned with employee participation, organizational learning, safety issues, or preventing wrongdoings. Having such measures is a precondition for identifying links between specific types of silence and specific country characteristics that eventually might help to disentangle the relations between country culture and silence.

Relationships between culture (dimensions) and silence might be more complex than previously assumed. Cultural dimensions have been suggested as a starting point for examining the relationship between culture and employee silence. Studies suggesting that dimensions such as power distance and collectivism are responsible for differences in silence (e.g., Botero & van Dyne, 2009; Rhee et al., 2014), however, drew upon a limited number of (mostly prototypical) countries and used individual-level scores to represent culture characteristics. Results of our study challenge and specify established views of the potential of individual cultural dimensions as predictors of silence.

Results showed that only three out of the nine cultural dimensions included in the study significantly explained variance in employee silence. The pattern that they showed indicates that silence is more likely to occur in cultures which accept status differences and rely on established structures, and less likely in cultures in which collective efforts are ingrained in their societal practices. Strong in-group bonds did not make silence more likely to occur nor did societal practices characterized by assertiveness make silence less likely. Moreover, our study specifies the motives that are responsible for the reluctance to challenge authorities in high power distance cultures. The distinct relationships that we found between silence and in-group and institutional collectivism point at the necessity to overcome traditionally unidimensional views of collectivism and paves the way for more differentiated views as developed by Vignoles and colleagues (2016) and combinations with other dimensions as proposed in the concepts of horizontal and vertical collectivism (Singelis et al., 1995).

Associations of silence with specific countries need to be reconsidered. Our results show that various countries ranked high (e.g., Croatia, Slovenia, Canada, and Iran) as well as low (Denmark, China, and Chile) on silence motives, and some countries ranked rather differently across the four silence types (e.g., Greece, Togo). Furthermore, the country clusters suggested by the GLOBE study showed no consistent pattern regarding the countries' silence scores (see Table 2 and Figures OS-1 and OS-2). These findings support prior research (e.g., Hasegawa & Gudykunst, 1998; Gudykunst et al., 1996) in challenging the validity of widespread assumptions regarding the use and value of silence in different cultures. They indicate that there are no typical countries in which silence is high or low, and silence motives are not necessarily all high or all low in any given country.

The amount of variance that cultural dimensions could explain in our study recommends caution when using cultural dimensions to predict silence and assign countries

as high- or low silence countries – at least for two reasons. First, different culture characteristics might be responsible for the same silence scores. While for some countries in our study silence might be driven by low institutional collectivism, the driver for others might be high power distance. Expecting a silent workforce due to their score on one particular cultural dimension would thus be misleading. Second, the effect of cultural dimensions could be substituted or neutralized by the work context and/or by country-specific features that are not necessarily represented in a cultural dimension. These features may result, for example, from specific traditions of providing participatory rights (see Szabo et al., 2002) and collective experiences relevant for silence (so-called "remote historic drivers"; Beugelsdijk & Welzel, 2018). The latter may include a socialization in authoritarian cultures (as it is the case in former Communist countries in Eastern Europe or countries with a history in colonization; den Hartog & Dickson, 2012) and growing up or living in difficult socio-economic conditions (Ehrenreich, 2001; Leana et.al., 2012).

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Cross-cultural research is challenging and, while results in terms of psychometric qualities justified scale adaptation, our study does not meet all the criteria emphasized for comparing results across cultures (Spector et al., 2015; Tsui et al., 2007). We address some of these limitations and suggest how overcoming them provides opportunities to further improve international research on employee silence.

Sample characteristics and geographical coverage. Due to limited resources, we were not able to obtain samples that are representative of their respective countries and are completely similar in features that might influence silence tendencies (e.g., gender, occupational sector, and managerial status). Besides collecting representative samples with respect to demographics or regions, representativeness could also be justified by measuring cultural variables (e.g., individualism) and showing that the scores of the sample match the

scores as achieved in large cultural studies. Data collection procedures also differed by country (see Table OS-1). However, using superficially equivalent data collection procedures such as online surveys in each country might not solve this problem as data collection procedures can have different implications across countries (see Spector et al., 2015).

Furthermore, while all of the GLOBE cultural clusters are represented in our samples with at least two countries, European samples dominate. One of the purposes of conducting this research was to make scales available in many languages, which eventually allows for extending silence research geographically. This is necessary as very few studies have been conducted in Arab countries, Latin America, and Africa leaving the diverse models of selfhood and silence that prevail in these regions marginalized (see Vignoles et al., 2016).

Country as a unit of analysis for examining cultural influences. While statistical measures (i.e., ICC) justified treating country as a unit of analysis in our study, the amount of explained variance by country was not large. As this is rather common in cross-cultural research (Tsui et al., 2007), some researchers challenge viewing countries as shared meaning systems (see Schwartz, 2014; Tung & Stahl, 2018). Indeed, individuals are subject to several influences within their country of origin and countries themselves are not homogeneous societies (Chao & Moon, 2005; Peterson et al., 2018). They can comprise subcultures and regions with distinct learning histories due to specific historical developments or geographical specifics. Further, differences in socioeconomic development can be a source of cultural variation within countries (Justin et al., 2019). Future research could identify whether sources of within-country-variation might also explain variance in silence.

Complementing social scientific with ethnographic approaches. When discussing approaches to cross-cultural studies, we introduced the distinction between social scientific and ethnographic approaches (Ting-Toomey, 2010). While the social scientific approach that we drew upon is useful for the purposes of this study (which was comparison of silence

tendencies across countries and cultural dimensions), conducting ethnographic studies could advance research on culture and silence and provide insights into some of our more ambiguous findings. For example, the low silence scores in China and the high silence scores in the Anglo cluster might be based on the fact that members of different cultures do not just behave differently in a particular situation, but define the situation itself differently (Leung & Cohen, 2011; Mendoza-Denton & Mischel, 2007). Situations related to silence and voice might be of high or low relevance for members of a culture and thus remaining silent becomes more salient and more likely to be remembered. Besides, ethnographic studies could reveal culture-specific motives for silence that we did not examine in our study (see Fontes', 2007, ethnographic study on shame as an important motive for silence in Latino cultures).

Going beyond GLOBE and cultural dimensions. The current study investigated silence motives in relation to the cultural framework of the GLOBE study (House et al., 2004). Starting with this established typology had the advantage that a relatively broad range of cultural characteristics could be related to silence, and scores for these characteristics were available for a large number of countries. However, the cross-cultural research literature is complex and offers various approaches to characterize and contrast cultures including high-/low-context cultures (Hall, 1976) and the World Values Survey (Inglehart, 2018; for more exhaustive lists, see Lytle et al., 1995; Taras et al., 2009). For some of these approaches – Schwartz' (2006) cultural value orientations, Hofstede's (1980) typology of cultural dimensions, Minkov and colleagues' (2017) revision of Hofstede's individualism-collectivism dimension, and the concept of cultural tightness (see Gelfand et al., 2006) – we provide brief descriptions and analyses in the Online Appendix.

Culture as a moderator. Our study focused on the direct effects that culture characteristics might have on employee silence. However, culture may also have a moderating effect on the relationships between more proximal antecedents and silence, and

cultural dimensions might interact in a similar way as individual traits do (Judge & Long, 2012; Spector et al., 2015; Tsui et al., 2007). For example, as cultural differences exist regarding the role of seniority and gender in societies, in societies in which older and male employees have a higher status, the barrier to overcome silence is higher for younger and female employees. Older and male employees, in turn, may experience greater responsibility to speak up. Kwon and Farndale (2020) suggested that cultural tightness (i.e., the extent to which cultures are characterized by strong norms and low tolerance of deviance; Gelfand et al., 2006, Triandis, 1996) could function as moderator between other cultural dimensions and silence. For example, the relationships between silence and power distance and institutional collectivism might be stronger if examined in tight cultures, because cultural tightness restricts the range of permissible behavior.

Conclusion

Securing effective communication and dealing with challenges to the status quo are central issues for the sustainable development of societal and organizational cultures. Despite frequent reports of detrimental silence in organizational practice across the globe, there is little common ground, empirically or from a measurement standpoint, on which to build a coherent body of knowledge on employee silence in different cultures. In the first large-scale study examining differentially-motivated employee silence, we validated scales in 21 languages that can facilitate international silence research. We further provided scores for 33 countries that can function as a benchmark for future research in these countries as well as orientation for practitioners doing business in increasingly diverse economic settings. Making a first step toward explaining international differences and similarities in silence motives, we linked culture dimensions from the GLOBE framework to silence. Results suggest that silence motives (with the exception of quiescent silence) are related to power distance, institutional collectivism, and uncertainty avoidance. Results also suggest that relationships

between cultural dimensions and silence are more complex than previously believed, and that stereotypical assumptions regarding cultural dimensions and the use of silence in specific countries need to be reconsidered. We recommend that – besides replicating our findings with stratified random samples – future research could benefit from complementing social scientific with ethnographic approaches, extending silence research geographically and conceptually, considering units of culture other than nations and cultural frameworks beyond GLOBE, and examining culture not just as an antecedent but as moderator between more proximal antecedents and silence.

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Table 1.

GLOBE Study Culture Dimensions (House et al., 2004) Examined in the Current Study and Their Relation to Differentially-motivated Silence Types

Cultural dimension[1]	**Brief definition**	**Relationships with employee silence motives as found in our study[2]**
Power distance	The degree to which members of a society expect power to be distributed equally or concentrated at higher levels.	As hypothesized, power distance was related to acquiescent and prosocial silence.
Assertiveness	The degree to which individuals are assertive, confrontational and aggressive in their relationships with others.	-
In-group collectivism	The degree to which members of a society express pride, loyalty, and cohesiveness in their organizations or families.	-
Institutional collectivism	The degree to which organizational and societal institutional practices encourage and reward collective distribution of resources and collective action.	Exploratory analyses showed a negative relationship with acquiescent silence.
Uncertainty avoidance	The extent to which members of a society rely on social norms, rules, and procedures to alleviate unpredictability of future events.	Exploratory analyses showed a negative relationship with opportunistic silence
Performance orientation	The degree to which a collective encourages and rewards group members for performance improvement and excellence.	-
Gender egalitarianism	The degree to which a collective minimizes gender inequality.	-
Humane orientation	The degree to which a society encourages and rewards individuals for being fair, altruistic, generous, caring and kind to others.	-
Future orientation	The degree to which members of a society engage in future-oriented behaviors such as planning, investing in the future, and delaying individual or collective gratification.	-

Note. [1]In this study, we used the societal practices scores to represent the cultural dimensions. [2]Only statistically significant results at $p < .05$ are reported.

Table 2

Demographic Details for Each Cultural Sample

Cultural unit	*n*	Age	Gender	Manager	Contract	*Language*	Cultural region[1]	City/ Region
		M (*SD*)	(% fem.)	(% yes)	(% perm.)			
Australia	259	44.39 (12.67)	–[3]	64	85	English	Anglo	Australia-wide
Belgium	171	33.16 (9.34)	65	12	79	Dutch	Germanic Europe	Flanders
Canada (English)	307	39.87 (12.06)	56	43	89	English	Anglo	5 regions[4]
Canada (French)	280	40.34 (12.47)	62	49	68	French	Anglo	Quebec
Chile	176	40.54 (8.75)	57	56	94	Spanish	Latin America	Area around Santiago
China	264	33.32 (6.08)	45	11	72	Chinese	Confucian Asia	Shenzhen
Colombia	157	30.24 (9.20)	55	31	61	Spanish	Latin America	Colombia-wide
Croatia	201	36.01 (9.32)	74	21	78	Croatian	Eastern Europe	Zadar county
Denmark	230	38.60 (12.87)	56	15	–[3]	Danish	Western Europe	Aarhus
France	244	39.10 (12.24)	50	43	84	French	Western Europe	Whole France
Germany	463	37.38 (12.87)	56	18	72	German	Germanic Europe	Western Germany
Greece	145	42.12 (10.15)	59	19	51	Greek	Eastern Europe	Macedonia
Great Britain	182	39.53 (10.43)	76	59	86	English	Anglo	UK-wide
Indonesia	202	39.41 (8.03)	63	33	89	Bahsa Indon.	Southern Asia	Central and western regions
India	319	33.95 (8.87)	67	35	77	English	Southern Asia	Whole India, major cities
Ireland	272	41.67 (9.95)	62	47	88	English	Anglo	Whole Ireland

Iran	256	38.96 (7.05)	30	42	75	Farsi	Southern Asia	5 regions[5]
Iraq	261	41.21 (9.40)	37	49	88	Arabic	Middle East	Iraq-wide
Italy	245	38.67 (12.95)	56	18	69	Italian	Western Europe	Piedmont
Japan	202	39.34 (10.49)	22	75	96	Japanese	Confucian Asia	Tokyo and Fukuoka
The Netherlands	201	39.02 (11.04)	48	33	89	Dutch	Western Europe	Whole Netherlands
Norway	189	45.11 (11.12)	35	28	96	Norwegian	Nordic Europe	Whole Norway
Pakistan	210	36.60 (7.85)	30	61	72	English	Southern Asia	Islamabad and Rawalpindi
Peru	246	32.39 (6.83)	55	–[3]	–[3]	Spanish	Latin America	Peru-wide
Poland	174	35.58 (8.37)	66	30	78	Polish	Eastern Europe	Northern Poland
Portugal	318	–[2]	62	25	75	Portuguese	Western Europe	Portugal-wide
Romania	273	42.54 (10.39)	59	29	89	Romanian	Eastern Europe	Lugoj, Western Romania
Russia	202	29.70 (11.42)	65	26	68	Russian	Eastern Europe	Moscow
Slovenia	301	44.06 (9.83)	48	81	88	Slovenian	Eastern Europe	Whole Slovenia
Spain	183	46.83 (9.62)	38	69	85	Spanish	Western Europe	Mainly in the South of Spain
Switzerland (French)	163	41.30 (10.10)	71	40	78	French	Germanic Europe	French-speaking part
Switzerland (German)	307	35.98 (10.77)	73	19	77	German	Germanic Europe	German-speaking part
Togo	190	36.94 (8.01)	27	48	67	English	Sub-Saharan Africa	Lomé
Turkey	204	32.25 (7.47)	49	78	88	Turkish	Middle East	Izmir

Uganda	225	30.73 (8.12)	44	50	66	English	Sub-Saharan Africa	Central and Eastern parts

Note. N = 8,222. Data were collected between 2014 and 2019. [1]Culture clusters as suggested by the Globe study, [2]Age was measured categorically, most frequent category was 18 – 24 years (26%); [3]Measure was not included in the survey [4]Nova Scotia; Ontario; Manitoba; Alberta; Brit. Columbia; [5]North-west provinces of Iran which are named Azerbaijani region, north-east, center, north-east, and north-west provinces.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics, Standardized Cronbach Alphas, and Revelle's Total Omega for Employee Silence across 35 Samples

Sample	Acquiescent silence		Quiescent silence		Prosocial silence		Opportunistic silence	
	M (*SD*)	ω_t[1]	*M* (*SD*)	ω_t[1]	*M* (*SD*)	ω_t[1]	*M* (*SD*)	ω_t[1]
Australia	3.85 (1.61)	.90	3.71 (1.64)	.92	3.70 (1.41)	.87	3.06 (1.50)	.88
Belgium	3.48 (1.81)	.84	3.08 (1.56)	.81	3.36 (1.47)	.80	2.16 (1.12)	.66
Canada (English)	4.04 (1.85)	.89	3.85 (1.79)	.88	3.86 (1.71)	.87	3.43 (1.77)	.87
Canada (French)	3.49 (1.74)	.91	3.38 (1.70)	.89	3.41 (1.63)	.90	3.15 (1.63)	.90
Chile	3.08 (1.74)	.86	2.66 (1.45)	.77	3.09 (1.61)	.87	2.09 (1.21)	.77
China	2.57 (1.48)	.82	2.35 (1.27)	.75	3.11 (1.73)	.87	1.84 (1.09)	.78
Colombia	3.68 (1.87)	.86	3.35 (1.55)	.71	3.45 (1.63)	.82	2.73 (1.50)	.76
Croatia	4.60 (1.70)	.85	3.69 (1.57)	.75	4.56 (1.52)	.85	2.59 (1.23)	.68
Denmark	2.70 (1.43)	.86	2.80 (1.31)	.80	3.11 (1.29)	.84	2.18 (1.08)	.77
France	3.96 (1.77)	.91	3.56 (1.66)	.87	3.65 (1.46)	.79	2.87 (1.38)	.76
Germany	3.52 (1.78)	.89	2.96 (1.53)	.86	3.61 (1.43)	.83	2.19 (1.10)	.65
Great Britain	3.91 (1.79)	.88	3.48 (1.70)	.87	3.64 (1.49)	.81	2.45 (1.19)	.70
Greece	3.67 (1.84)	.86	2.79 (1.49)	.82	3.81 (1.76)	.89	2.18 (1.26)	.73
Indonesia	3.55 (1.87)	.84	3.47 (1.41)	.87	4.40 (1.34)	.86	3.11 (1.28)	.77
India	3.70 (1.45)	.75	3.35 (1.56)	.82	3.85 (1.46)	.75	3.03 (1.31)	.68
Ireland	3.49 (1.71)	.87	3.32 (1.60)	.86	3.56 (1.45)	.86	2.54 (1.26)	.77
Iran	4.44 (1.66)	.87	3.44 (1.55)	.81	3.85 (1.54)	.85	3.03 (1.41)	.77
Iraq	2.95 (1.63)	.93	2.50 (1.40)	.87	2.97 (1.51)	.91	2.21 (1.26)	.87
Italy	3.58 (1.66)	.81	2.96 (1.63)	.87	3.74 (1.49)	.80	2.44 (1.34)	.73
Japan	3.18 (1.37)	.77	3.14 (1.50)	.83	3.38 (1.43)	.83	2.52 (1.19)	.69
The Netherlands	3.40 (1.71)	.90	3.17 (1.53)	.86	3.23 (1.50)	.86	2.74 (1.51)	.91
Norway	3.51 (1.59)	.90	3.34 (1.39)	.86	3.81 (1.33)	.87	2.80 (1.28)	.85
Pakistan	2.92 (1.01)	.45	3.19 (1.09)	.39	2.90 (1.19)	.70	2.63 (1.02)	.55
Peru	3.21 (1.55)	.87	2.96 (1.54)	.89	3.37 (1.62)	.90	2.48 (1.25)	.82
Poland	3.71 (1.72)	.85	3.37 (1.52)	.85	3.68 (1.56)	.87	2.60 (1.31)	.70
Portugal	3.48 (1.77)	.85	3.19 (1.62)	.86	3.31 (1.55)	.83	2.32 (1.28)	.79
Romania	3.42 (1.64)	.82	2.72 (1.57)	.86	3.46 (1.50)	.77	2.47 (1.35)	.75
Russia	3.02 (1.48)	.80	3.28 (1.53)	.78	3.23 (1.52)	.81	2.83 (1.51)	.84

Slovenia	4.23 (1.75)	.88	3.73 (1.70)	.87	4.07 (1.51)	.83	3.18 (1.57)	.84
Spain	3.48 (1.79)	.89	2.95 (1.54)	.86	3.49 (1.59)	.83	2.10 (1.02)	.67
Switzerland (French)	3.60 (1.76)	.87	3.47 (1.61)	.84	3.87 (1.51)	.84	2.21 (0.97)	.68
Switzerland (German)	3.43 (1.80)	.89	3.09 (1.56)	.86	3.64 (1.46)	.82	2.07 (0.92)	.61
Togo	3.64 (1.65)	.75	3.46 (1.50)	.71	4.25 (1.53)	.82	2.54 (1.34)	73
Turkey	3.35 (1.67)	.81	3.33 (1.63)	.79	3.72 (1.62)	.83	2.32 (1.36)	.77
Uganda	3.24 (1.57)	.75	3.13 (1.48)	.66	3.59 (1.52)	.70	2.83 (1.34)	.65

Note. N = 8,222. [1]Revelle's (2018) total omega. Cronbach's alpha scores were in the same range, +/-.02, for all countries except Pakistan. For opportunistic silence, differences were slightly larger.

Table 4

Results of the Confirmatory Factor Analyses for the Full Sample

Model	X^2	*df*	*p*	CFI	TLI	RMSEA [90% CI]	SRMR	AIC
1. Four orthogonal factors	8,611.09	54	< .001	.74	.69	.17 [.17 – .17]	.31	349,721.28
2. One-factor model	7,336.16	54	< .001	.76	.71	.16 [.16 – .17]	.08	348,757.36
3. Second-order factor	1,269.34	50	< .001	.96	.95	.07 [.06 – .07]	.05	339,128.75
4. Four correlated factors	1,255.35	48	< .001	.96	.95	.07 [.07 – .07]	.05	339,114.58

Note. N = 8,222. All models were estimated using the MLR estimator and, as such, the X^2, CFI, TLI, and RMSEA represent the robust versions as produced by *lavaan* (Version 0.6-7; Rosseel, 2012). The measurement model with four correlated factors fits the data better than a second-order factor model, $\Delta X^2(2) = 12.71$, $p < .01$, $\Delta AIC = 14.18$. We also compared these measurement models excluding Colombia, Pakistan, and Togo due to their suboptimal individual fit indices (see Table OS-2). Again, the measurement model with four correlated factors fitted the data better than a second-order factor model, $\Delta X^2(2) = 18.61$, $p < .001$, $\Delta AIC = 22.42$.

Table 5

Results of the Measurement Invariance Assessment via Confirmatory Factor Analyses

Model	**X^2**	***df***	***p***	**CFI**	**TLI**	**RMSEA [90% CI]**	**SRMR**	**ΔX^2**	**Δ*df***	***p***	**ΔCFI**	**ΔRMSEA**	**Pass**
1. Equal form (configural invariance)	3,504.96	1,680	< .001	.95	.93	.08 [.08 – .08]	.06	–	–	–	–	–	✓
2. + equal loadings (metric invariance)	4,058.27	1,952	< .001	.95	.94	.08 [.08 – .08]	.07	549.83	272	< .001	< .01	< .01	✓
3. + equal intercepts (scalar invariance)	5,467.77	2,224	< .001	.92	.91	.09 [.09 – .09]	.08	1,646.64	272	< .001	< .03	< .02	✗

Note. N = 8,222. All models were estimated using the MLR estimator and, as such, the X^2, CFI, TLI, and RMSEA represent the robust versions as produced by *lavaan* (Version 0.6-7; Rosseel, 2012). X^2 differences of the robust X^2 test statistics of the respective models were calculated following the procedure recommended by Bryant and Satorra (2012). To assess whether a particular measurement invariance held, we applied the cut-offs of **Δ**CFI ≤ .02 and **Δ**RMSEA ≤ .03 for test of Model 2 against Model 1, and **Δ**CFI ≤ .01 and **Δ**RMSEA ≤ .015 for test of Model 3 against Model 2.

Table 6

Intraclass and and Zero-order Correlations for Age, Gender, Managerial Status, and the Four Silence Types at Both Levels of Analysis

Variable	$ICC(1)_{uc}$[1]	$ICC(1)_{c}$[2]	$ICC(2)_{uc}$[1]	M[3]	SD[3]	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Age	.14	–	.97	38.20	11.02	–	.18	.35*	.28	.14	.14	.14
2. Gender[4]	.07	–	.95	-[4]	-	.07***	–	.44**	-.18	-.15	-.20	.06
3. Managerial status[5]	.16	–	.98	-[5]	-	.04**	.10***	–	.19	.39*	.07	.38*
4. Acquiescent silence	.06	.06	.94	3.53	1.72	.00	-.03**	-.04**	–	.76***	.78***	.57***
5. Quiescent silence	.05	.05	.92	3.21	1.58	-.09***	-.04***	-.05***	.63***	–	.66***	.77***
6. Prosocial silence	.05	.06	.93	3.60	1.55	-.03**	-.03**	-.02	.44***	.55***	–	.44**
7. Opportunistic silence	.08	.08	.95	2.58	1.37	-.04**	.02*	-.01	.49***	.58***	.48***	–

Note. 8,222 employees from 35 samples. Below the diagonal, the pooled within-sample correlations are presented, and, above the diagonal, the sample size weighted between-sample correlations are presented. [1]The subscript "uc" indicates the respective unconditional *ICC*. [2]The subscript "c" indicates the conditional *ICC*(1) in that age, gender, and managerial status were controlled at level 1. [3]These descriptive statistics refer to the full sample – for the descriptive statistics of the specific samples, please avail yourself of Tables 2 and 3. [4]Gender was coded: 0 = female, 1 = male, 46% were male; Full sample: n_{female} = 4,277, n_{male} = 3,686, n_{NA} = 259. [5]Managerial status was coded: 0 = no, 1 = yes; 39% were managers; Full sample: N_{no} = 4,839, N_{yes} = 3,137, N_{NA} = 246. $^{*}p$ <.05, $^{**}p$ <.01, $^{***}p$ < .001; all p-values stem from two-sided tests.

Table 7a.

Results of Separate Multilevel Models for Each of the Nine GLOBE Dimensions for Societal Practices (controlled for within-level variables)

	Acquiescent Silence				Quiescent Silence				Prosocial Silence				Opportunistic Silence			
	*b**	*SE*	95% CI lower	95% CI upper	*b**	*SE*	95% CI lower	95% CI upper	*b**	*SE*	95% CI lower	95% CI upper	*b**	*SE*	95% CI lower	95% CI upper
Between-level																
Power distance	0.38*	0.16	0.07	0.70	0.13	0.16	-0.17	0.44	0.40*	0.17	0.07	0.72	0.12	0.18	-0.24	0.47
Assertiveness	0.22	0.15	-0.07	0.50	-0.12	0.20	-0.51	0.27	0.08	0.20	-0.31	0.46	-0.25	0.20	-0.64	0.13
In-group collectivism	0.15	0.25	-0.34	0.63	-0.03	0.22	-0.47	0.41	0.25	0.22	-0.19	0.68	0.20	0.23	-0.24	0.65
Institutional collectivism	-0.48***	0.13	-0.74	-0.22	-0.02	0.24	-0.48	0.45	-0.36	0.19	-0.73	0.01	0.09	0.19	-0.28	0.45
Future orientation	-0.10	0.20	-0.48	0.28	0.06	0.17	-0.27	0.39	-0.04	0.21	-0.45	0.38	-0.09	0.19	-0.47	0.29
Gender egalitarianism	0.06	0.27	-0.47	0.58	0.32	0.19	-0.06	0.69	-0.13	0.23	-0.59	0.33	0.35	0.20	-0.05	0.75
Human orientation	-0.18	0.16	-0.50	0.15	0.14	0.21	-0.28	0.55	0.05	0.22	-0.39	0.49	0.33	0.19	-0.05	0.72
Performance orientation	-0.00	0.22	-0.43	0.42	0.06	0.23	-0.39	0.51	-0.00	0.21	-0.42	0.42	0.01	0.23	-0.45	0.47
Uncertainty avoidance	-0.28	0.23	-0.73	0.18	-0.20	0.19	-0.58	0.18	-0.18	0.24	-0.65	0.29	-0.35*	0.17	-0.69	-0.01

Note. 5,036 observations from 22 samples. All coefficients derived from the fully standardized solution estimated using random-intercept multilevel models in M*plus* (Version 8.4; L. K. Muthén & Muthén, 2017). In every model, we controlled for age, gender, and managerial status at the within-level. $^{*}p$ <.05, $^{**}p$ <.01, $^{***}p$ < .001; all *p*-values stem from two-sided tests.

Table 7b.

Results of the Combined Multilevel Model for the Three GLOBE-Dimensions for Societal Practices Included in Hypotheses 1-3

	Acquiescent Silence				Quiescent Silence				Prosocial Silence				Opportunistic Silence			
			95% CI				95% CI				95% CI				95% CI	
	*b**	*SE*	lower	upper	*b**	*SE*	lower	upper	*b**	*SE*	lower	upper	*b**	*SE*	lower	upper
Within-level																
Gender	-0.03	0.02	-0.06	0.01	-0.01	0.02	-0.05	0.03	-0.02	0.02	-0.06	0.03	0.03	0.02	-0.00	0.06
Age	0.01	0.02	-0.23	0.04	-0.10***	0.01	-0.13	-0.08	-0.02	0.02	-0.06	0.01	-0.04*	0.02	-0.08	0.00
Manager	-0.04	0.02	-0.09	0.00	-0.04	0.02	-0.08	0.01	-0.02	0.02	-0.05	0.02	-0.02	0.03	-0.07	0.03
R^2_{Within}			.00				.00				.00				.01	
Between-level																
Assertiveness	0.11	0.14	-0.17	0.40	-0.22	0.16	-0.52	0.09	-0.01	0.19	-0.38	0.37	-0.25	0.18	-0.60	0.10
Ingroup-Collectivism	-0.23	0.32	-0.86	0.40	-0.36	0.32	-0.99	0.28	-0.09	0.33	-0.74	0.55	0.16	0.35	-0.54	0.85
Power Distance	0.54*	0.25	0.04	1.03	0.43	0.28	-0.12	0.97	0.47	0.30	-0.13	1.06	0.04	0.31	-0.58	0.65
$R^2_{Between}$			.20				.10				.16				.09	

Note. 5,036 observations from 22 samples. All coefficients derived from the fully standardized solution estimated using random-intercept multilevel models in M*plus* (Version 8.4; L. K. Muthén & Muthén, 2017). $^{*}p$ <.05, $^{**}p$ <.01, $^{***}p$ < .001; all *p*-values stem from two-sided tests.